

Name: Hyclis Williams

Title: Paraprofessional

Organization or Agency: AFSCME Local 3429

Topic: HB-6659 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2025, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, members of the Appropriations Committee: Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of House Bill 6659 concerning education funding for Connecticut.

My name is Hyclis Williams, President, Local 3429, representing paraprofessional and some support staff in New Haven Public Schools. New Haven schools are underfunded and have been for many years. We are reaching rock bottom and are unable to sustain the basic needs of our students, which, in my opinion, includes giving students a good fundamental education that builds them to become valuable citizens in our community. Due to the underfunding and disparities, we are experiencing staffing shortage that affects and inhibits teaching and learning to our very vulnerable citizens. Take a look at the academic score for New Haven and you can see the damage that's already done, and it will continue to decline if more funding is not provided expeditiously.

We need enough funding for teachers, paraprofessionals and support staff along with the resources to meet the needs and challenges we face in the teaching and learning of our unique school population. Because there is a shortage of paraprofessionals and teachers, paraprofessionals are filing in as substitute teachers on a day-to-day and long-term basis. In some cases, where there was a paraprofessional and a teacher in a classroom, the para is now filling in as the teacher with no support because there is no teacher. That means the para has to teach a class of 20 to 27 students with no help, prepare lesson plans, do parent conferences, support IEPs — the whole shebang. Although we receive a stipend of \$45 per day for subbing, our salary is less than half of what a teacher starting with no experience makes. We have to work multiple jobs to make ends meet and that's a shame. We all know that a good education is fundamental to the academic growth and social emotional development of our youngest citizens. Teaching staff cultivate and nurture that foundation and deserve to have the resources to attract and retain qualified teachers and paraprofessionals to attain that. Let's not continue the inequities public school students face because of race, ethnicity, zip code, socio-economic status, etc. Equity requires accountability.

I implore each and everyone of you to support this bill. You have the power and a responsibility to provide appropriate funding for each of our students and living wages for the staff. They are our future citizens and decision makers. What you do today will determine your future and that of all of us.

Thank you for your time and attention to this very important matter.

Hyclis Williams

President, AFSCME Local 3429 Paraprofessionals